



Young Adult Literature: Dear Teachers: Please Help My Kids Become Readers

Chris Crowe

The English Journal, Vol. 89, No. 1, Research Revisited. (Sep., 1999), pp. 139-142.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0013-8274%28199909%2989%3A1%3C139%3AAYALDTP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-3>

The English Journal is currently published by National Council of Teachers of English.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucte.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Young Adult Literature

CHRIS CROWE, EDITOR

DEAR TEACHERS: PLEASE HELP MY KIDS BECOME READERS

Dear Mr. or Ms. English Teacher:

I hope that by the time this arrives the hectic first days and weeks of school are behind you and that you're settled into the work that you and I both love: teaching young people about writing, language, and, of course, literature. I have a keen interest in your work this year, not just because I, too, am a teacher, but also because three of my children are in your English classes. Joanne, my youngest, is in eighth grade and looking forward to her last year of middle school. Carrie, a ninth grader, is just beginning her high school career, while Jonathan, my only son, is in his final year of high school.

You probably don't know Joanne or Carrie or Jonathan yet, but let me assure you that they're good kids. They'll participate in class discussions and activities, rarely be absent, and get their work done on time. I'm pretty sure they won't distinguish themselves in your classes, but you'll find them cooperative, hard-working, and pleasant students.

But this letter is not intended to convince you of the goodness of my children; you'll know well their strengths and flaws by the end of May. I'm writing to ask you to work consciously to help my children become readers, not just readers of school assignments, but independent readers, the kind who will continue reading on their own long after they've finished school. I've been working on this all their lives, but now that they're teenagers, they don't listen to me like they used to. Most of the time, recommended reading from me is the kiss of death for a book, but your suggestions about books may actually get somewhere. Just suggesting good books alone, however, won't be enough. I know my kids and their reading habits pretty well, and it will

be your actions, along with your words, that will ultimately make an impression on them.

I realize I'm not their English teacher, but as their father, here's what I hope you will teach my children about books and reading this year:

Help them (especially Jonathan) realize that reading books can be a refreshing and rewarding alternative to TV, movies, shopping, or hanging out with friends.

Like most other American teenagers, my children have active and sometimes interesting lives. They're busy with sports, bands and orchestras, church activities, part-time jobs, and, of course, school work and study. They don't have much free time, but on those rare moments when they truly are bored, I wish they would look to the bookshelf instead of the telephone or television for something to do.

Help them discover—or remember—the pleasures of reading.

You may already know that Jonathan despises reading. Carrie is ambivalent about it. Joanne sometimes likes it and sometimes doesn't. *Please* help them encounter books or stories that will grab and sustain their interests. I'd like, just once, to have one of them stagger into the kitchen, bleary-eyed and late for breakfast, because of staying up all night to finish a novel. I'd love to see them curled up on the couch rereading a favorite book. I would go to my grave a contented old man if once before I die, and before my kids grow up, I could hear one of my children talking excitedly to a friend about a book just finished.

Allow them to exercise "The Reader's Bill of Rights" (from Daniel Pennac's *Better Than Life* [Coach House Press, 1994]) whenever possible.

1. The right to not read.
2. The right to skip pages.
3. The right to not finish.
4. The right to reread.
5. The right to read anything.
6. The right to escapism.
7. The right to read anywhere.
8. The right to browse.
9. The right to read out loud.
10. The right not to defend your tastes.

I know that "The right to not read" is a little problematic in English classes, and it would be the first right Jonathan would claim anytime reading is mentioned in school. But I would hope that you will teach my children that these are the rights that *real* readers, people no longer confined to schools, live by. Maybe you can allow them to exercise most of these rights when it comes to their outside, elective reading. Maybe you can talk to them about how you as a reader exercise these rights. Maybe you can help them understand how to negotiate the requirements of school with the rights of readers. Maybe you can simply use Pennac's Bill of Rights as a springboard for a discussion about reading, how it works, and why it's important. I'm convinced that whatever you do to help my children understand and exercise these rights will contribute to their becoming lifelong readers.

Please don't mistake me for the pushy parent that I really am, but in addition to thinking about *what* I hope you'll teach my children, I've also thought about *how* you can teach it:

Require and encourage outside, elective reading.

You and I both know they're busy, but we also know that they probably won't read much unless they have to. You're in a much better position than I am to encourage/coerce them to read something other than the required texts for your classes.

Steer them toward good YA books.

Joanne loves Mildred D. Taylor's books, and any book that helps her appreciate the value of families, high standards, and integrity is fine with me. She's already crazy about sports and boys; I think she'd love YA sports novels by R. R. Knudson, Tessa Duder, Chris Crutcher, Dean Hughes, and Robert Lipsyte, but as her overprotective and probably paranoid father, I'd really appreciate it if my barely thirteen-year-old daughter didn't read books that would fan her romantic imagination any hotter than it already is.

Carrie, my softest-hearted and most empathetic child, would probably be troubled by some of the good but hard-edged YA novels around. She may be ready in a few years to take on books that deal with the darker side of human experience, but for now I'd prefer it if you'd point her to books like *Shiloh*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *Roll of Thunder*,

Hear My Cry; *Finding My Voice*; *All Together Now*, or nearly any one of Gary Paulsen's adventure books. She might also enjoy some of Lurlene McDaniel's tear-jerkers or YA fiction or nonfiction about female athletes.

Please give my children opportunities in class to discuss informally what they've read.

As an avowed "reluctant reader," Jonathan is a tougher nut to crack. He will resist all attempts to read, but because he is essentially a good student—or at least because he really wants good grades—he will read when it's required. He didn't like Cormier's *I am the Cheese*, but I think he might like *Tunes for Bears to Dance To*. He's had good experiences with most of Gary Paulsen's books, including *Nightjohn* and *Sarny* and might like Paulsen's new historical novel *A Soldier's Heart*. Because he likes ideas and facts, you might encourage him to discover good YA nonfiction.

Help them connect with what they read.

Please give my children opportunities in class to discuss informally what they've read. Rather than ruining their reading experiences with the standard book report, allow them some freedom in deciding how to respond to what they've read. Maybe you can simply conduct an informal interview with them about their most recent outside reading.

Nudge them to works related to what they've just read, or, if they're in a reading rut, nudge them into something different.

I believe in momentum. If one of my children likes a particular book, encourage further reading by saying something like, "Well, if you liked that, I'm pretty sure you'd also like this." Of course, I believe that nearly any reading is better than no reading, but if my children happen to fall into a real reading rut, please encourage/coerce them into something new or different.

Read yourself and talk to my children and their classmates about what you read.

I worry that my kids have the idea that reading is something only students do. Sure, they know that their mother and I are readers, but we're merely their old, slightly eccentric parents. The more you demonstrate your own enthusiasm for reading, the more my children will begin to see that reading may actually be a worthwhile activity pursued by people who have real lives.

Read some of what they read.

If, for example, Jonathan ever got excited by a book, I would hope that you'd read the same book as soon as possible so you could talk with him about it. The fact that you would read something that one of my children read and liked would validate not only their reading experience but also the book they read. Too often YA books are demeaned by English teachers, so your willingness to read—and to admit enjoying—a book read by one of my children would give them and me great pleasure.

Read aloud in class.

My teenagers probably wouldn't admit this, but they like being read to. As an English teacher, you're a good reader. Would you mind taking a few minutes every once in a while to read aloud to my children and their classmates? Even Jonathan, the twelfth grader, would like listening to you read a good story.

Give them time to read in class.

You're busy. You have a million things to cover in class. Your day is already too short. I know all that, but I also know that my kids' lives are crammed with activities outside of the school day. They can find time to read at home, but it would be great for them to have even a little regular reading time in English class. It might help them get into a slow-moving novel that they would otherwise give up on. It might help them avoid procrastinating their outside reading. It might show them that you value reading enough to give them some class time to do it.

I know you're busy, overworked, and underpaid. I appreciate what you do, and I sincerely hope you will have your best school year ever. But for as much as I care about your success as a teacher, please know that I care infinitely more about the

success of my children. For many years, what they did and learned was strictly up to me and my wife, but now we share them with you because you're in a position to give them many things we cannot. I trust you'll do just that, and by the end of this year that they'll be better off than they are now.

But please, amid all the classes to teach, papers and tests to grade, standardized tests to administer, meetings to attend, dances to plan and chaperone, and the myriad other things you'll have to do this year, please, please don't forget that one of the most important things you'll do in the next nine months is help my children love reading.

With all best wishes,



Chris Crowe

Discoveries: New or Overlooked YA Books Worth Reading

Bat 6 by Virginia Euwer Wolff (Scholastic, 1998). For fifty years, the small Oregon towns of Bear Creek Ridge and Barlow have sponsored an annual softball game between their sixth grade girls' teams. Set in 1948 and 1949, this novel uses the alternating narration of the twenty players to tell about the prejudice and eventual understanding that results from the big game.

Been Clever Forever by Bruce Stone (HarperCollins, 1988). "I am smart, is the problem," says sixteen-year-old Stephen Douglass. His precociousness gets him into all kinds of trouble, especially with an emotionally disturbed teacher. His funny wise-cracking first-person narrative will appeal to bright students who themselves have felt alienated from school.

The Boy Who Owned the School: A Comedy of Love by Gary Paulsen (Orchard, 1990). Painfully shy Jacob Freisten's goal is to make it through high school without being noticed. His plan is foiled when a beautiful classmate notices him and when he's trapped into participating in a school play. This hilarious novella is a great text to read aloud to your students.

50 Short Science Fiction Tales, Isaac Asimov and Groff Conklin, eds. (Macmillan, 1963). This book has plenty of short stories that work well as read-alouds in class. Many of the stories are by

classic science fiction writers, and most of them have the kind of ironic twists that appeal to junior high/middle school students.

Ki Te Ao by Apirana Taylor (Penguin, 1990). This collection by a New Zealand author combines the Maori and Anglo culture in nineteen stories that are a mix of whimsy and witchery, social conflicts and cultural stresses.

Lives and Works: Young Adult Authors, Marilee Foglesong, Maureen Barbieri, and Dana L. Fox, eds. (Grolier, 1999). This is a handy reference guide to contemporary and classic authors read by teenagers. The eight volumes contain short biographies on 248 authors from Douglas Adams and Louisa May Alcott to Richard Wright and Paul Zindel.

Lizard by Dennis Covington (Delacorte, 1991). Thirteen-year-old Lucius Sims is called Lizard because of his deformed face, and even though he's not mentally disabled, he's been placed in the Louisiana State School for Retarded Boys. He manages to escape and joins a traveling repertory company, which introduces him to a series of interesting characters and adventures.

The Oxboy by Anne Mazer (Knopf, 1993). This mythical allegory is set in a world where hu-

mans and animals once intermarried but where humans now search out and destroy those who are not purely human.

Permanent Connections by Sue Ellen Bridgers (HarperCollins, 1988). At seventeen, Rob has run out of second chances and is sent to spend a semester in his father's rural hometown in North Carolina. Rob initially resists the positive influences of his new environment but is gradually transformed by good family and friends.

Shades of Darkness: More of the Ghostly Best Stories of Robert Westall by Robert Westall (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994). Westall's benign ghost stories are spooky and eerie without being gratuitously gory or violent. Experienced readers will appreciate Westall's fine writing; inexperienced readers will enjoy the suspenseful stories.

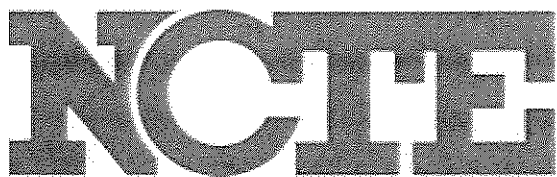
Wrestling with Honor by David Klass (Scholastic, 1989). Klass combines excellent wrestling scenes with an ethical dilemma: Should an athlete compete if to do so he must violate his own ethics? This is what wrestling team captain Ron Woods must decide when he fails a drug test despite the fact that he doesn't use drugs.

Call for Papers

Dedicated to teaching and learning beyond traditional disciplines and interests, *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (JAEPL)* invites submissions for its sixth annual issue. We solicit theory-grounded manuscripts that discuss pedagogical concerns focusing on topics that extend beyond currently accepted attitudes toward, and paradigms of, language. We invite an exploration of subjects that range over a spectrum of interests including, but not limited to, emotion, imagery, kinesthetics, ecofeminism, situated knowledge, meditation, healing, inspiration.

Send by January 15, 2000, 4 copies of letter quality manuscripts (attach postage for mailing 3 copies to readers), MLA style, approximately 12-15 pages including works cited to: Linda Calendrillo, Co-Editor, *JAEPL*, Department of English, 600 Lincoln Avenue, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL 61920, e-mail: cfltc@eiu.edu.

Send editorial inquiries to: Kristie S. Fleckenstein, Co-Editor, *JAEPL*, Department of English, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306-0460, e-mail: kflecken@gw.bsu.edu.



Young Adult Literature: English Teachers Are from Mars, Students Are from Venus (But YA Books Can Help Interplanetary Understanding)

Author(s): Chris Crowe

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The English Journal*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Mar., 1999), pp. 120-122

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/822443>

Accessed: 08/02/2012 11:04

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



National Council of Teachers of English is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The English Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Young Adult Literature

CHRIS CROWE, EDITOR

ENGLISH TEACHERS ARE FROM MARS, STUDENTS ARE FROM VENUS (BUT YA BOOKS CAN HELP INTERPLANETARY UNDERSTANDING)

When I was a kid, people blamed the misunderstandings and tensions between grown-ups and teenagers on the "generation gap." Adolescents and adults butted heads because they were born in different times, into different circumstances. As a teenager with limited experience and understanding, I accepted that explanation as the reason why I didn't think—or act—the way my parents and teachers did.

These days, I see the world differently. As the father of four teenagers and as a teacher who's taught thousands of adolescents, I no longer believe in the generation gap because it can't adequately explain the dissimilarities between today's adults and kids. It can't, for example, explain why my usually rational sixteen-year-old son kept performing a chemistry "magic" trick until he set his hand, then his pants, on fire. Or why my thirteen-year-old daughter wants to go clothes shopping *every* day. Or why kids with normal pain thresholds think body piercing is cool. Or why students who can track the intricacies of a semester's worth of soap operas complain that *Othello* is too difficult to read. Or why one of the most common student responses to the reading of tried and true great literature is, "This sucks!"

The generation gap isn't the cause of the gulf between teenagers and us. The *real* reason is more elementary. It turns out that what our students have been saying about us for years is true: English teachers are from Mars. And our students are from Venus.

Of course I'm borrowing this idea from John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (HarperCollins, 1992), but the more I think about

what separates most of us from most of our students, the more convinced I am that we *are* essentially different, as different as we would be if we came from separate planets.

It's ironic that as teachers we often forget that; who knows better than teachers just how alien our students are much of the time—especially when it comes to literature? It must be a Martian defect because even though we *know* the quirks and characteristics of our teenage Venusian students, we often assume they're like us when we select readings, and we're surprised, disappointed, frustrated, or mad when they don't like what they read, or worse, when they won't read at all. Of course, I'm generalizing here. There are always a few students who have lots of reading experience and come to school ready and willing to dive into literature. And there are even a few who will one day major in English and become Martians themselves. But it's the rest of them, the average Venusians, that I worry about. If we ignore their interests and needs, they'll ignore our literature and may very well turn into lifelong nonreaders.

To try to help you realize just how different these Venusians are from us, here are some specific points of departure:

Martians	Venusians
appreciate ambiguity	see things as black or white
enjoy challenging, sophisticated reading	like easy answers
like to discuss abstractions	live in a concrete world
have a broad world view	have an egocentric world view
are lifelong readers	are lifelong nonreaders
have good reading skills and experience	have little or no reading skills or experience
have quiet time to read	have no quiet time
reinforce one another's reading	ridicule those who read
know about <i>The New York Times</i> best-seller list	know about MTV's Top Ten
understand the pleasure of reading	believe that reading is work, a real pain
have college training	have little or no training
exercise authority	rebel against authority

have adult freedoms
and experience

have adolescent limita-
tions and mistaken
ideas about adult-
hood

These differences are at the root of many of the problems we face in trying to help our students first become readers and then appreciate and enjoy literature. Too often, English teachers forget that most of our students are from Venus, so their tastes, interests, and needs have little in common with ours. For example, most of the literary works we teach in high school trickle down from the university curriculum where we, as ardent English majors (Martians), first studied them in depth under the direction of scholars who had spent their careers studying and teaching literature. In addition to the literary artfulness we discovered in those works, as teachers we also like the themes of these texts because in one way or another they resonate with our own lives. I love Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* because, as a middle-aged man, I can relate to Willy Loman's midlife crisis. Tillie Olsen's short story, "I Stand Here Ironing," hits me right in the heart because as a parent struggling with and worrying about my own children, I immediately understand the parental angst Olsen's narrator expresses. As an aging adult who's had his share of brushes with mortality, I like William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" because it expresses more eloquently than I can my own reflections about death.

Too often, English teachers
forget that most of our students
are from Venus, so their tastes,
interests, and needs have little
in common with ours.

But as a young high school teacher anxious to teach students to love what I loved, I hadn't thought about *why* my professors and I loved the literature we did; I simply assumed that my students would love it as much as I did because it was

great literature. I didn't realize that most of them couldn't relate to Willy Loman, or to Emily's mother, or to Bryant's thoughts about death, or that they wouldn't connect with Brutus, Hester Prynne, or Walt Whitman. Fortunately, over the years I became a better teacher and found ways to bring my students closer to the required readings, but still the majority of my students found little to enjoy or appreciate in our literary canon, and for some students, the "boring" classics bolstered their argument that reading was a waste of time.

The great works of literature that
we Martians love must not be lost,
but even we Martians should
realize that we have to help
students love reading before we
can help them love the classics.

When I finally realized that I'm from Mars and my students are from Venus, I started paying more attention to the books they were reading on their own, and that's when I discovered YA literature. Of course, not all my students read YA books, but many of them did—and they liked them. I started reading the books myself, and I liked them too. Sure there was some schlock, but there were lots of terrific books too, books that could foster a love of reading and prepare students for more formal literary study. YA books helped me begin to connect with the Venusians on their level; I wasn't looking for literature to replace the classics I loved, but I knew that I couldn't expect Venusians to appreciate Martian books until they first developed an appreciation for reading. So I encouraged students to use YA books as outside reading, and sometimes I included YA works in selected literature circles. I'd book talk good YA novels I'd read recently and started sharing the book reviews from *The ALAN Review* with my students.

I found that reading books written and marketed specifically for them helped the Venusians remember—or discover—the simple pleasure of reading. When they felt like readers, they were better able to handle the classics and other required texts.

And that's the role YA literature should play in secondary classrooms. The great works of literature that we Martians love must not be lost, but even we Martians should realize that we have to help students love reading before we can help them love the classics. By encouraging our students to read YA literature, we can help reluctant readers overcome their reluctance, and we can allow avid readers to discover a whole field of books they may have overlooked. YA publishers and authors work very hard to produce books that will appeal to the unique characteristics of the Venusians who inhabit our classrooms; as English teachers, we can't afford to miss the opportunity these books give us to bring our students from Venus a little closer to Mars.

Discoveries

Some new or overlooked YA books worth reading:

Danger Zone by David Klass (Scholastic, 1996). Jimmy Doyle, a star basketball player from a small town in Minnesota, gets a chance to play on an elite American team in an international tournament. Klass deftly combines terrific basketball scenes with thoughtful issues.

Jungle Dogs by Graham Salisbury (Delacorte, 1998). Boy Regis, a sixth grader living in a small Hawaiian town, has to come to grips with his older brother's involvement in a gang. In the process, Boy learns much about himself, family, love, and courage.

Holes by Louis Sachar (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998). This is one of the best and most creative books to come out in 1998. Cursed by misfortune, Stanley Yelnats is sent to a juvenile detention center in the middle of the desert. The plot has more twists and turns than a rattlesnake, but each bend is surprising and satisfying.

The Machine Gunners by Robert Westall (Knopf, 1975). Chas McGill and his friends live in northern England during World War II and make a

hobby of collecting military artifacts. Their collecting turns into adventure when they find a machine gun in a downed Nazi plane and try to hide it from authorities.

Nightfather by Carl Friedman (Persea Books, 1994). This unusual but powerful Holocaust story is told from the point of view of the children of a concentration camp survivor. They see only the effect "the camps" had on their father; their innocence and desire to understand their father's experience make this an unforgettable book.

The Sacrifice by Diane Matcheck (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998). In a time before white men had discovered Yellowstone Park, a young Crow woman struggles to find her place in her family and tribe. This is a wonderful story about a strong Native American woman fighting for survival in the western wilderness.

Ultimate Sports edited by Donald R. Gallo (Delacorte, 1995). Gallo has a knack for getting terrific stories from popular YA authors; this collection of short stories about sports offers plenty of variety, surprises, and satisfying reading.

Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories by Jean Shepherd (Dolphin Books, 1971). If you liked the comic film, *A Christmas Story*, you'll love the book that inspired parts of the movie. Shepherd is a comic genius, and three of the eight stories in this book present hilarious dating disasters that will appeal to teenage readers and anyone else who's fallen in love.

Warriors Don't Cry [abridged edition] by Melba Pattillo Beals (Archway, 1995). Beals was one of the nine students chosen to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. This is her painful and honest account of the trials she endured that year. Students will find the details of those dark days both shocking and moving.

When She Was Good by Norma Fox Mazer (Arthur A. Levine, 1997). Young Em Thurkill is terrorized by her huge and cruel older sister. Though her sister brutalizes Em physically and emotionally, Em clings to a spark of hope within herself. This story of urban survival and resilience is at times very painful to read, but Mazer leaves Em and the readers an assurance that Em will survive and thrive despite her horrible circumstances.

Reading Workshop Conference Form

Student:	Date:	SG	I
Book Title:	Book Level:		
Page:			
Book Selection Choose the most significant questions	NI - 1	P - 2	G - 3
<input type="checkbox"/> "Is this book <u>easy, just right</u> or challenging for you? <input type="checkbox"/> "Why did you choose this book?" <input type="checkbox"/> "What is your opinion of the book so far?" <input type="checkbox"/> "Can you summarize what has happened from when we last met?"			
Oral Reading Check for reading rate accuracy and fluency Fluency %	NI - 1	P - 2	G - 3
Have students read a short excerpt from the text <input type="checkbox"/> Skipped words <input type="checkbox"/> Mispronounced words <input type="checkbox"/> Word substitutions <input type="checkbox"/> Words in the wrong order <input type="checkbox"/> Struggling phrases, long pauses Notes:			
Mini Lesson Focus Skill/Strategy _____	NI - 1	P - 2	G - 3
To be asked at every conference			
"How have you applied this strategy to your independent reading? If you did not apply this strategy, can you tell me where you applied a different strategy?" Notes:			
Comprehension Support Questions			
Choose a minimum of two (2) significant questions to ask			
<input type="checkbox"/> Predicting: "How did your making predictions about what would happen next help you understand the story?" <i>Student Response:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Connecting: "Did you make any connections while reading? How did it help you better comprehend?" <i>Student Response:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Questioning: "What questions do you have based on what you have read?; What are you wondering?" <i>Student Response:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing: "Did you develop a mental image when you read a sentence/paragraph/page/chapter?" "Where?" <i>Student Response:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Inferencing: "What conclusions did you make/draw based on the clues in the text?" "What were those clues?" <i>Student Response:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Determining Importance: "What did you learn? What features in the text signaled importance?" <i>Student Response:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing: "At what point did you say to yourself, "Aha, now I get it? "based on what you already knew" <i>Student Response:</i>			
Reading Log	NI - 1	P - 2	G - 3
Review Reading Log to score for completion/accuracy			
Total Points: / 18			
Conference Reflection/Reading Goal			
Student will work on the following goals:		Notes:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of skill/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Improved book choice/genre <input type="checkbox"/> Improved reading fluency <input type="checkbox"/> Improved written response in log <input type="checkbox"/> Other			

Read Like a Reader

What's going on here? Personally, I find teaching reading to be rather intimidating because I can never really know for sure how students are doing it. I can look out across a classroom and see a group of kids with their faces buried in between the pages of their books, but I have no way of knowing what's really going on. For all I can tell, they could be sitting quietly, thinking about nothing, and turning pages just to make me feel good.

There's no way to know for sure what goes on in a reader's head. And every reader probably reads a little differently. But here's a list of six things I think all readers do, things that make them more successful, and make reading more fun. I call this "reading like a reader":

Question. Readers ask good questions about the things they read. What kinds of questions do they ask? Just about anything that comes to mind: why something is happening or not happening, why a character feels or acts a certain way, things we wonder about or are confused by, words we may not know the meanings of, and so on. Questions help readers clarify their understanding.

Predict. Readers make guesses about what is coming up next. No reader, it seems, can resist thinking about what a writer is going to say next. It's just part of human nature to anticipate things. Predicting helps readers sort out important information from unimportant information, it helps them organize their thinking as they encounter new material.

Infer. Readers figure out things about what they read that aren't actually written in the text. There's almost always more to a story than just the words on the page. Often, writers leave "clues" that good readers can use to discover important information.

Connect. Readers think about what their reading reminds them of. We can't help but be reminded of our own lives as we read. We're also reminded of similar things we've read in other texts and other parts of the same text we're reading at the time.

Feel. Readers have feelings while they read, they express emotions. Sometimes, it seems like we have a direct connection to what we're reading: sad parts make us feel sad, happy parts make us feel happy, scary parts scare us, and so on. But often, the feelings we have are more subtle, we may feel them only slightly, for example, when we read with more expression. Much of the meaning we get from a piece of writing comes from the emotions we feel when read it.

Evaluate. Readers make judgments while they read. Is this good? If so, what's good about it? Do I like it? Why? Should I keep reading or should I put this down and get something else? Readers are finicky, impatient, judgmental. The evaluations they make help them decide whether or not what they are reading is valuable and, if so, how they might use it.

Read Like a Writer

There's another way to read? Normally, when we read, we focus on *what* the writer is trying to say. When we read like a writer, however, we focus on *how* the writer is saying it. Because we are writers ourselves, we pay close attention to the techniques a writer is using and how those techniques contribute to the meaning of the piece and improve its quality. We may even borrow the techniques we learn for our own writing. I call this "reading like a writer." When we read like this, there are six things we pay attention to:

Ideas. Ideas are the heart of the piece — what the writer is writing about and the information her or she chooses to reveal about it. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer reveal the main idea? What types of details does the writer use? How does the writer achieve his or her purpose? How does the writer's choice of ideas affect the reader?

Organization. Organization refers to the order of ideas and the way the writer moves from one idea to the next. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What kinds of leads does the writer use and how do they pull us in and make us want to read more? What kinds of endings does the writer use and how do they work to make the writing feel finished and to give us something important to think about? How does the writer handle transitions? What techniques does the writer use for sequencing? How does the writer control pacing?

Voice. Voice is how the writing feels to someone when they read it, it's the expression of the writer's individual personality through words. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer demonstrate passion for the topic? How does the writer reveal emotions? How does the writer put personality into the piece?

Word Choice. Word Choice refers to writer's selection of particular words and phrases to express ideas. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What techniques (simile, metaphor, strong verbs, etc.) does the writer use to make the word choice more specific, more memorable, and more effective?

Sentence Fluency. Sentence Fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language as we read it, it's how the writing sounds when read aloud. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: What kinds of sentence constructions does the writer use? How does the writer vary the length and construction of his or her sentences? How does the writer use "sound" effects like alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm?

Conventions. Conventions are the ways we agree to use punctuation, spelling, grammar, and other things that make writing consistent and easy to read. When we read like a writer, we try to answer questions like these: How does the writer use conventions to make the writing easy to read and more meaningful? Does the author use conventions in unusual ways that are successful?

Annotating a Text

1. **Pick up** a pencil, a pen, or a post-it.
2. **Read everything at least twice.**

The first time, read quickly to get a sense of what the text is about.

The second and subsequent times read carefully.

Mark anything that you think is:

- A. confusing,
- B. interesting
- C. surprising, or
- D. important.

Mark anything that is unfamiliar and keep going.

3. **Begin to annotate.**
 - A. Circle, underline, or stick on a post-it for important ideas and explain their significance.
 - B. Mark repetitions or rhetorical signals.
 - C. Circle confusing words or phrases. Define from context or dictionary if possible.
 - D. Note passages that seem inconsistent.
 - E. Note passages that generate a strong positive or negative response.
4. **Write questions where you made annotations.** These questions can be for the instructor to answer, for the class to discuss, for you to use in future writing assignments, or for you to keep as a reminder of what you were thinking.
5. **Think about the connections** between this text and other texts you have read, information from other classes, and personal experiences.

Critical Thinking Questions: What Would Socrates Ask?

Clarity: Could you elaborate further? Could you give me an example?

Accuracy: How can we determine if that is true? How can we verify your statements?

Precision: Could you be more specific? Could you provide more details?

Relevance: How does that relate to the issue? How does that align with the question?

Depth: What are some of the complexities of this question? What factors need to be considered?

Breadth: Do we need to consider another point of view? Do we need to look at this from a different perspective?

Logic: Does what you say follow from the evidence? Does all of this make sense?

Significance: Is this the central idea? Is this the most important issue to consider?

The goal of the Socratic Method of inquiry is for you as students to think for yourselves rather than just learn "right" answers.

Adapted from Dr. Richard Paul, Director of the Foundation for Critical Thinking at Sonoma State University http://www.cyberhigh.fcoe.k12.ca.us/PASS_Program/methodology/Socraticteaching.htm

Socratic Seminar Reflection

Name _____

Seminar # _____

Text Title: _____

Author: _____

Opening Question(s):

1. Summary of key ideas:

2. Reaction: Identify what someone said; write down his/her comment. React to his/her statement.

3. Explain how the Seminar influenced your thinking about the topic or the text(s).

4. Socratic Connections: Identify and explain a connection to . . .

another writer/poet	news article	movie	song
commercial	Photograph/painting	TV show	person you know
experience you had	observation	another culture	famous/infamous person
your choices			

Explain your connection fully:

5. Self Assessment

Taking a position on a question	5	4	3	2	1
Using evidence to support a position or presenting factual information	5	4	3	2	1
Drawing another person into the discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Asking a clarifying question or moving the discussion along	5	4	3	2	1
Highlighting and marking the text with questions/commentary	5	4	3	2	1

Identify a personal goal for the next seminar:

Identify a group goal and how you would be willing to contribute to it:

What is a Socratic Circle?

A Socratic circle is based on Socrates' theory whereby he engaged his students in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of answers. Used today this process encourages students to think through, evaluate a question, piece of writing, or problem and find the answers to their own questions in the process. We will use a similar format and forum with our novel study. Below are a few guideline and expectations for you as participants.

Dialogue Verses Debate

Important Note: A Socratic circle is **not** a debate. So what is the difference, you may ask?

A Dialogue Is...	A Debate Is...
Collaborative: multiple sides work toward shared understanding	Oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
One listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground.	One listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
Enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.	Defends assumptions as truth.
Creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.	Creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
One submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it.	One submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
Calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.	Calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
One searches for strengths in all positions.	One searches for weaknesses in the other position.
Respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend.	Rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
Assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to a greater understanding.	Assumes a single right answer that somebody already has.
Remains open-ended.	Demands a conclusion.

Dialogue Is Characterized By...

- Suspending judgment.
- Examining our own work without defensiveness.
- Exposing our reasoning and looking for limits to it.
- Communicating our underlying assumptions.
- Exploring viewpoints more broadly and deeply.
- Being open to disconfirming data.
- Approaching someone who sees a problem differently not as an adversary, but as a colleague in common pursuit of better solution.

Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Circle

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A circle is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute.
3. Do not participate if you are not prepared. A circle should not be a bull session.
4. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
5. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
6. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
7. Listen carefully.
8. Speak up so that all can hear you.
9. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
10. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
11. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.

Expectations of Participants in a Socratic Circle

When I am evaluating your Socratic Circle participation, I ask the following questions about your participation. Did he/she....

- Speak loudly and clearly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- Use the text to find support?
- Listen to others respectfully?
- Stick with the subject?
- Talk to each other, not just to the leader?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask for help to clear up confusion?
- Support each other?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Question others in a civil manner?
- Seem prepared?

Socratic Circle: Participant Rubric

A Level Participant	<p>Participant offers enough solid analysis, without prompting, to move the conversation forward</p> <p>Participant, through her comments, demonstrates a deep knowledge of the text and the question</p> <p>Participant has come to the circle prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text</p> <p>Participant, through her comments, shows that she is actively listening to other participants</p> <p>Participant offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation</p> <p>Participant's remarks often refer back to specific</p>
----------------------------	--

	parts of the text.
B Level Participant	<p>Participant offers solid analysis without prompting</p> <p>Through comments, participant demonstrates a good knowledge of the text and the question</p> <p>Participant has come to the circle prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text</p> <p>Participant shows that he/she is actively listening to others and offers clarification and/or follow-up</p>
C Level Participant	<p>Participant offers some analysis, but needs prompting from the circle leader</p> <p>Through comments, participant demonstrates a general knowledge of the text and question</p> <p>Participant is less prepared, with few notes and no marked/annotated text</p> <p>Participant is actively listening to others, but does not offer clarification and/or follow-up to others' comments</p> <p>Participant relies more upon his or her opinion, and less on the text to drive her comments</p>
D or F Level Participant	<p>Participant offers little commentary</p> <p>Participant comes to the circle ill-prepared with little understanding of the text and question</p> <p>Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary to further the</p>

	<p>discussion</p> <p>Participant distracts the group by interrupting other speakers or by offering off topic questions and comments.</p> <p>Participant ignores the discussion and its participants</p>
--	---

Adapted from Adams' Studyguide.org http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm

Goals for Studying Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*

Goal 1: Learn How to Effectively Use the Socratic Circle to Study Literature

Goal 2: Examine in Depth the Literary Elements of a Mystery

Goal 3: Collaborate in Groups to Create One of the Following:
 Original Clue Game
 Script for a Scene from *And Then There Were None*
 Script or Book for an Original Mystery Story

Who... What... When... Where... Why...????

Before Christmas break we will take our "creations" and collaborate with Mrs. Hughes 6th Period 7-2 in our first (hopefully annual) Mystery Fair in the Media Center. Teams will compete with each other to see who can come up with the best, most original mystery project. So get ready, get set, read!!!

Reading/Socratic Circle Timeline

(Subject to Change Depending on School Schedule)

Circle Prep I November 15-19: Read and prepare Chapters 1-6;

Socratic Circle I November 20.

Circle Prep II November 20- 26: Read and prepare Chapters 7-12;
 Socratic Seminar II November 27
 Circle Prep III November 27- December 3; Read and Prepare
 Chapters 13-Manuscript Document; Socratic Seminar III December 4.
 Create Mystery Fair Projects December 6-14
 Mystery Fair in Media Center TBA December 17-19

Example Grading Rubric for Socratic Circles

Name: _____

Socratic Seminar: _____

Objective	Criteria	Points Awarded Comments
1. Six Passages Prepared for Socratic Circle Chapters ____ thru ____	Passages are marked in book and written in reading journal including the page number with annotations included.	Possible 30 Points
2. 1 st Contribution in Dialogue	Passage or quote clearly stated and supported with student comments, reflection, and specific parts mentioned from the text.	Possible 10 Points
3. 2 nd Contribution in Dialogue	Passage or quote clearly stated and supported with student comments, reflection, and specific parts mentioned from the text.	Possible 10 Points
4. Contribution to Peer Ideas or Opinions	One counter point of view, clarification, and/or follow-up on peer's passage/quote, which is also supported by text.	Possible 10 Points
5. Dialogue Contribution	Demonstrated active listening by: Listening respectfully Sticks to subject Talks with each other, not just the leader Supports each other Avoids hostile exchange Questions in civil manner Discusses ideas rather than opinions Seems prepared	Possible 10 Points
		Points Earned ____ with 70 Possible

Adapted from Patti Martin, Reading Coach Bumpus M.S.

Circle Rubric

Name: _____

Socratic Circle: I, II, II

Objective	Criteria	Points Awarded Comments
1. Six Passages Prepared for Socratic Circle Chapters ____ thru ____	Passages are marked in book and written in reading journal including the page number with annotations included.	Possible 30 Points
2. 1 st Contribution in Dialogue	Passage or quote clearly stated and supported with student comments, reflection, and specific parts mentioned from the text.	Possible 10 Points
3. 2 nd Contribution in Dialogue	Passage or quote clearly stated and supported with student comments, reflection, and specific parts mentioned from the text.	Possible 10 Points
4. Contribution to Peer Ideas or Opinions	One counter point of view, clarification, and/or follow-up on peer's passage/quote, which is also supported by text.	Possible 10 Points
5. Dialogue Contribution	Demonstrated active listening by: Listening respectively Sticks to subject Talks with each other, not just the leader Supports each other Avoids hostile exchange Questions in civil manner Discusses ideas rather than opinions Seems prepared	Possible 10 Points
		Points Earned ____ with 70

		Possible
5. Dialogue Contribution	Demonstrated active listening by: Listening respectively Sticks to subject Talks with each other, not just the leader Supports each other Avoids hostile exchange Questions in civil manner Discusses ideas rather than opinions Seems prepared	Possible 10 Points

Adapted from Patti Martin, Reading Coach Bumpus M.S.

Socratic Circle Reflection

Instructions

After each Socratic Circle you will be responsible for turning in a one to two page reflection on the experience. This reflection will comprise three sections: (1) strategies/ techniques for comprehension and analysis, (2) reflection on performance, and (3) reflection on content. The information below will help you understand what content needs to be placed in each of the three sections.

1. *Strategies/Techniques for Comprehension and Analysis*

In the section you will list at least two to three strategies/techniques that were used by either inner circle to comprehend and analyze the selection of text. Strive to identify new strategies that were used for the first time. For each identified strategy/technique listed, you will need to write a 2-3-sentence description of how it was used.

This list of possible strategies/techniques could go on forever. However, this may be a type of thinking with which you are unfamiliar. In order to help you get started, here's a list of some other possible strategies:

- Word choice (Diction)
- Use of repetition
- Use of Capitalization
- Voice
- Change in verb tense
- Organization/Structure
- Sentence structure
- Author's mood / tone
- Visualizing
- Summarizing
- Descriptive / Figurative Language

2. *Reflection on Performance*

This section will be divided into two paragraphs: (A) a description of how you performed as an individual in the Socratic circle and (B) a description of how your group performed in both the role of the inner circle and the role of the outer circle. Again, there is no right or wrong answer here, only well-expressed opinions. You might consider the following questions for each paragraph:

Individual Performance

- How would you rate your preparation for this Socratic circle? Why?
- How would you rate your contributions (both the number of times you spoke and the quality of what you said) on the conversation? Why?
- How would you rate the level of teamwork you displayed? Why?
- How could you personally have improved what transpired during the Socratic circle?
- What goals do you have for your next Socratic circle performance?

Socratic Circle Reflection

Group Performance

- How would you rate your group's preparation for this Socratic circle? Why?
- How would you rate the quality of the overall conversation? Why?
- How would you rate the level of teamwork displayed? Why?

3. Reflection on Content

This final section will comprise three items: (1) a thesis statement for an "imaginary" essay you might write about the meaning and importance of the ideas expressed in the selection of text, (2) a paragraph in which you describe (in general terms) the main points you might make in that "imaginary" essay, and (3) a paragraph in which you make connections between the content of this selection of text and some element of your own experience. Elements you might consider connection this text to include: what we are currently learning in this class, learning that has occurred in other classes, personal experiences from your life outside of school, experiences of friends and family members with which you are familiar, current events, movies, literature, music, art, etc. Like the previous three sections, this last paragraph has no right or wrong answer, only opinions.

* Thesis Statement Generator *

The thesis statement is a quick 1-2 sentence summary that helps the reader generalize the ideas explored in the passage, chapter, or novel you are studying. The statement usually has three parts: a subject, a method, and a message. The subject portion identifies the author/title, the method identifies the literary technique or device the author uses, and the message conveys the idea or lesson the author seeks to have the reader consider. See below:

In _____,	_____
(title of piece)	(author's name)
Uses/employs _____ to reveal _____	
(method)	(message)

Checklist:

Before turning in a reflection, use the following checklist to ensure you have included all of the necessary requirements to receive full credit:

- _____ Your Name, the date of the Socratic circle, and the title of the selection of text
- _____ Two to three techniques for comprehension and analysis
- _____ One paragraph reflecting on your individual performance
- _____ One paragraph reflecting on the performance of your group
- _____ A thesis statement for an "imaginary" essay on this text
- _____ One paragraph explaining the main points of that "imaginary" essay
- _____ One paragraph explaining the connections you made between the text and your own life.

Socratic Seminar

Summary

The National Paideia Center, which has developed extensive materials on using seminars in classrooms, defines a Socratic seminar as a **'collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text.'**

Student Handouts: Open-Ended Questions and/or Critical Reasoning Analysis Sheet, Discussion Partner Evaluation

Purpose

The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text. In the Seminar, participants systematically question and examine issues and principles related to a particular content, and articulate different points-of-view. The group conversation assists participants in constructing meaning through disciplined analysis, interpretation, listening, and participation.

Background

In a Socratic Seminar, the participants carry the burden of responsibility for the quality of the discussion. Good discussions occur when participants study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas. The discussion is not about right answers; it is not a debate. Students are encouraged to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly while examining ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful, manner.

Key Elements

There are several basic elements of a Seminar:

- Text
- Classroom Environment
- Questions

Text

All participants read the text in advance. The text (or article, film clip, or other artifact) should contain important and powerful ideas and values. It should be at the appropriate level for the students in terms of complexity, and should relate directly to core concepts of the content being studied. A certain degree of ambiguity or potential for different interpretations also makes for richer discussion. *It is extremely helpful to number the paragraphs in a text so that participants can easily refer to passages.*

Classroom Environment

The classroom should be arranged so that students can look at each other directly. A circle or square works well. Some teachers like to use desks and have students use name card tents; others prefer simply to use chairs without desks.

The discussion norms should be prominently posted. Some teachers like to also post the initial key question.

Socratic Seminar continued

Questions

Prepare several questions in advance, in addition to questions that students may bring to class. Questions should lead participants into the core ideas and values and to the use of the text in their answers. Questions must be open-ended, reflect genuine curiosity, and have no 'one right answer'! Choose one question as the key interpretive question of the seminar to focus on and begin discussion.

During the seminar, use particular questions to move the discussion along. Towards the end of the seminar, some teachers like to use closing questions that encourage participants to apply the ideas to their personal experiences and opinions. Answering these closing questions does not require use of the text but provides students with the chance to share their own perspectives. Lastly, debriefing questions help students reflect on the process of the seminar.

- **Sample questions to serve as the key question or interpret the text:**
 - What is the main idea or underlying value in the text?
 - What is the author's purpose or perspective?
 - What does (a particular phrase) mean?
 - What might be a good title for the text?
 - What is the most important word/sentence/paragraph?
- **Sample questions to move the discussion along:**
 - Who has a different perspective?
 - Who has not yet had a chance to speak?
 - Where do you find evidence for that in the text?
 - Can you clarify what you mean by that?
 - How does that relate to what (someone else) said?
 - Is there something in the text that is unclear to you?
 - Has anyone changed their mind?
- **Sample questions to bring the discussion back to students in closing:**
 - How do the ideas in the text relate to our lives? What do they mean for us personally?
 - Why is this material important?
 - Is it right that....? Do you agree with the author?
- **Sample debriefing questions:**
 - Do you feel like you understand the text at a deeper level?
 - How was the process for us? Did we adhere to our norms?
 - Did you achieve your goals to participate?
 - What was one thing you noticed about the seminar?

Socratic Seminar continued**Seminar Structure**

The Seminar can be divided into three time periods:

Before the Seminar

- Introduce the seminar and its purpose (to facilitate a deeper understanding of the ideas and values in the text through shared discussion).
- Have students read the text. They may use one of several formats to process the information. The Open-Ended Questions and/or the Critical Reasoning Analysis Sheet can be used to help students understand the content. These can be used as the 'ticket' to participate in the seminar. Share any expectations related to assessment.
- Review the Discussion Norms
- In addition to the classroom discussion norms you may have already set, it is important to include the following norms, or ones that are similar:
 - Don't raise hands
 - Listen carefully
 - Address one another respectfully
 - Base any opinions on the text

Additional norms might include

- Address comments to the group (no side conversations)
- Use sensitivity to take turns and not interrupt others
- Monitor 'air time'
- Be courageous in presenting your own thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change your mind in the face of new and compelling evidence

During the Seminar

- Be seated at the level of the students and remind them to address each other and not you!
- Pose the key question.
- Ask participants to relate their statements to particular passages, to clarify, and to elaborate.
- If the conversation gets off track, refocus students on the opening question by restating it.
- Use additional questions to move the discussion along.
- Invite those who have not spoken into the conversation. Some teachers use talking chips (each student is allotted a number of chips that they use when they make a contribution) or a talking chain (asking each person to comment or pass in a circle). The chips may be especially useful when working with very young children but should be used only until students 'get the idea'.
- You may wish to record for your own purposes the main ideas discussed and the contributions people make (using a shorthand or diagram) to refer to as you facilitate.
- It can be helpful to summarize the main points made in the discussion, either at a quiet point or towards the end of the discussion.

After the Seminar

- Ask debriefing questions of the students.
- Share your own experience with the seminar as a facilitator.

Using Interpretive, Literal, and Evaluative Questions

Interpretive Questions

A Socratic discussion is a text-based discussion in which an individual sets their own interpretations of the text alongside those of other participants. The aim is a mutual search for a clearer, wider and deeper ('enlarged') understanding of the ideas, issues, and values in the text at hand. It is shared inquiry, not debate; there is no opponent save the perplexity all persons face when they try to understand something that is both difficult and important.

— Walter Parker, PhD,
University of Washington

The core of the Socratic Seminar is devoted to considering interpretive questions. These are questions that ask students to interpret the text. They should be genuine questions - ones that you are also interested in. No single right answer exists, but arguments can be made to support different positions. Students need to make their points using passages from the text to answer these questions. Sample interpretive questions might ask for the values evidenced by the author within the text, or might ask students to choose the most important word/sentence/paragraph and describe why it is the most important.

Literal Questions

Literal questions are used by some teachers at the very beginning of a seminar, to ensure comprehension of the text. These are questions that can be answered directly from the text. The answers are contained within the text and are stated clearly. Sample literal questions might ask for an important text detail, fact, or quote.

Evaluative Questions

Evaluative questions are sometimes used at the very end of a seminar, to allow students to share their own positions and opinions. Answers to evaluative questions rely on student's own experiences, not on the text itself. Students will not need to cite particular passages to answer these questions. Sample evaluative questions might ask for student opinions about the author's position, or how the ideas in the text relate to their own lives.

Variation: Fishbowl

If you have a large class, it may be helpful to divide the students into two groups and use a fishbowl format.

One half of the class is in the 'center' facing each other and discussing the text, while the remainder is on the 'outside' observing and listening. Members of the outer circle can take notes or use an evaluation form to track the overall conversation or to focus on specific participants. The Rubric for Evaluating Classroom Discussions, as well as the Socratic Seminar Fishbowl Discussion Partner Evaluation could be used for this purpose.

During the seminar, some teachers reserve an empty 'hotseat' for those in the outer circle who really want to jump in to make a contribution and then leave.

At the end of the conversation, the outer circle can share their observations. The groups then switch to allow the outside group a chance to discuss.

Assessment

A rubric for evaluating a Socratic Seminar discussion is provided in the assessment section. This rubric may also prove useful to students who are evaluating other students or reflecting on their own participation.

Based on materials shared by Walter Parker, PhD, University of Washington, Paula Fraser, Bellevue PRISM program, Bellevue, WA, Jodie Mathwig and Dianne Massey, Kent Meridian High School, Kent, WA. We also gratefully acknowledge the influence of the Coalition of Essential Schools and the National Paideia Center.

Socratic Seminar Discussion Partner Evaluation

Name of person you are observing _____

Your name _____

Seminar Topic _____ Date _____

1) Record a check for each time your partner contributed in a meaningful way: _____

2) On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, how well did your partner do at the following?

_____ Analysis and Reasoning

Did your partner...

Cite reasons and evidence for his/her statements with support from the text?

Demonstrate that they had given thoughtful consideration to the topic?

Provide relevant and insightful comments?

Demonstrate organized thinking?

Move the discussion to a deeper level?

Notes/Comments:

_____ Discussion Skills

Did your partner...

Speak loudly and clearly?

Stay on topic?

Talk directly to other students rather than the teacher?

Stay focused on the discussion?

Invite other people into the discussion?

Share air time equally with others (didn't talk more than was fair to others)?

Notes/Comments:

_____ Civility

Did your partner...

Listen to others respectfully?

Enter the discussion in a polite manner?

Avoid inappropriate language (slang, swearing)?

Avoid hostile exchanges?

Question others in a civil manner?

Notes/Comments:

When preparing for a Socratic Seminar, write questions using these sentence frames to stimulate your thinking about the article(s) you read. Choose and complete 5 of the following:

- What puzzles me is...
- I'd like to talk with people about...
- I'm confused about...
- Don't you think this is similar to...
- Do you agree that the big ideas seem to be...

- I have questions about...
- Another point of view is...
- I think it means...
- Do you think...
- What does it mean when the author says...
- Do you agree that...

6-Traits CLASSROOM RESOURCE: "Post-It" Note Templates; five variations for each trait

This sheet was designed to be run through the feed tray of a printer. Store-bought Post-Its can be affixed over the squares below, the sheet can be run through a second time, and the printing will appear right on the Post-It's. You can also Xerox these sheets on colored paper, cut the squares out, and staple them to students' papers.

Idea Development:

Rank each skill from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in the following:

- _____ I used a balance of showing and telling.
- _____ My details try to paint a picture in the reader's head.
- _____ I took a unique approach when writing about this topic.
- _____ I stayed on topic throughout the entire writing.
- _____ My theme/message is clear to my reader.

Organization

Rank each skill from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in the following:

- _____ My introduction grabs the reader's attention.
- _____ My conclusion links back to my introduction.
- _____ I used transition words to move from idea to idea.
- _____ My paragraphs show where my sub-topics begin & end.
- _____ My title stands for my entire draft, not just a part of it.

Voice

Rank each skill from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in the following:

- _____ I really tried to show passion about my topic.
- _____ If read aloud, it sounds like something I might really say.
- _____ I did things in my writing to help my audience understand.
- _____ I captured a tone or mood with my words.
- _____ My use of humor or sarcasm is appropriate for this assignment.

Word Choice

Rank each skill from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in the following:

- _____ My adjectives are excellent and thoughtful.
- _____ I use a good balance of action and linking verbs.
- _____ My nouns are precise; I don't overuse pronouns.
- _____ It is clear that I am not afraid to take risks with new words.
- _____ I used a few color and texture words to describe.

Sentence Fluency:

Rank each skill from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in the following:

- _____ My sentences mostly begin with different words.
- _____ I use a mixture of simple and complex sentences.
- _____ I use a variety of transitional words when I write.
- _____ If read aloud, you can hear a rhythm behind my sentences.
- _____ If I repeated anything, I did it for effect.

Conventions:

Rank each skill from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in the following:

- _____ My spelling was looked over by _____.
- _____ My "end punctuation" was looked over by _____.
- _____ My commas and apostrophes were looked over by _____.
- _____ My capitalization was looked over by _____.
- _____ My grammar was looked over by _____.

Writing Conferences: A Guide

STEP ONE Prepare yourself for your conference. Make sure you have a draft that both you and your partner can read. Think about what you want to get out of the conference (what is your goal?).

Write your goal here: _____

STEP TWO Decide who will share his/her paper first. This person is now the author. The person who is giving feedback is now the critic. Write your names below:

First Author: _____

First Critic: _____

STEP THREE The critic needs to choose (and circle) 5 of the questions below to help have a conversation about the paper before reading it. Ask the writer the questions and jot down any notes to help you read the paper better.

Questions for the Critic to Ask the Author

1. How did you start your piece? Tell me what all you did once you got started.
2. What was it like to write this? Did you have any problems while writing?
3. How does your piece make you feel?
4. Who is your audience?
5. How do you want your audience to feel or what do you want them to think?
6. What is your best skill as a writer?
7. What in your writing (in general) do you feel is weak or that need to work on?
8. What do you feel is the best thing about this piece?
9. How can I help you? Are there particular parts (in this piece) that you want me to pay close attention to or that are giving you trouble?
10. What will you do next? (ask this one after reading)

Notes: _____

STEP FOUR Read the first paper.

STEP FIVE The author needs to choose (and circle) 5 of the questions below to help have a conversation about the paper after reading it. Ask the critic the questions and jot down any notes to help you when revising the paper.

Questions for the Author to Ask the Critic

1. What do you think my paper is about?
2. What would you like to know more about?
3. What was confusing to you?
4. How did my piece make you feel?
5. Can you find a theme to my paper? What is it?
6. Can you picture everything? Where did you lose the picture?
7. Does my dialogue sound real?
8. How would you describe my tone?
9. What kind of writer am I? Do you like my style?
10. What trait would you say is my strongest one in this piece? Which one is my weakest?

Notes: _____

STEP SIX The critic needs to provide the author with specific, helpful feedback about the paper (at least 5 comments). Use the following feedback fill-ins (if desired) to start.

Feedback Fill-ins

I liked _____ (specific techniques, events, or details you liked)

I wondered _____ (questions left after reading it)

You should consider _____ (suggestions for improvement)

STEP SEVEN The author should thank the critic for the feedback and make any necessary notes to help with revision. The author can use the space below or write on his/her draft (or both!).

Notes: _____

STEP EIGHT Switch roles and write the appropriate names below:

Second Author: _____

Second Critic: _____

STEP NINE Repeat steps 3-7 with the second paper.

STEP TEN Thank your partner and—finally—go back to your paper to revise!